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NSC BRIEFING NOTES

16 March 1954

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THE FRENCH NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DEBATE ON INDOCHINA

A. Fundamental issue in 9 March French National Assembly debate on Indochina was whether to try for immediate settlement with the Viet Minh or wait for a Geneva conference solution.

I. Radical deputy Pierre Mendes-France led the appeal for direct negotiations.

a. He argued that the Geneva talks could end only in a stalemate leading to:

1. direct American intervention, and
2. retaliation by Communist China.

II. The government made clear its intention to make every effort to end the war at Geneva.

III. The American embassy commented: "The Government obviously bought time in Indochina with the Geneva conference, but the Assembly only extended credit on a short-term basis."

a. The embassy added that if Geneva produces no tangible results, the government will have an "insurmountable task" to counter Assembly pressure for negotiations with Ho Chi Minh.

IV. Subsequently, a Foreign Ministry spokesman told embassy officials that the success of Geneva would probably depend on a revision of American policy on China.

State Dept. review completed

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- B. Referring to the current negotiations with Vietnamese representatives in Paris, the resolution adopted by the Assembly included a statement that France would be relieved of its obligation toward the Associated States if they repudiated any provision of the French constitution relative to the French Union.
- I. This paragraph was accepted by a considerably larger majority than the rest of the resolution.
- II. It could foredoom the current negotiations, since the Vietnamese reject the French Union concept as defined in the constitution.

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